

VZCZCXRO5485  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV  
DE RUEHLB #0388/01 0741527  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 141527Z MAR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1297  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2314  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000388

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/FO:KHARRINGTON, MPOPAL  
DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2018  
TAGS: [PARM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: HAMADEH DISCUSSES "BEFORE, DURING AND  
AFTER THE SUMMIT"

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

-----  
[11](#). (C) Telecommunications Minister Marwan Hamadeh shared with Charge and DCM that he was unable to persuade French Charge Parant to attend the March 14 congress. Regarding the upcoming Arab Summit, he said the GOL is "not in the mood" to attend, but there are issues to be decided before, during and after the Summit. Those include who to send, whether or not to enlarge the council of ministers, and how to elect a president. The majority is considering pressing Speaker Berri to open parliament to deal with issues concerning "the health of the country," including the budget law. The Syrian opposition have announced the establishment of a TV station, most likely funded by the Saudis. End summary.

MARCH 14 CONGRESS:  
HARIRI MIGHT BE THERE,  
BUT FRENCH WON'T AGREE  
-----

[12](#). (C) On March 14 Charge, DCM and Econoff met with Minister of Telecommunications Marwan Hamadeh at his home. With a future meeting scheduled to review telecommunications issues, this meeting focused on the current political situation, in particular on the March 14 congress scheduled for later the same day. Hamadeh was unable to say for sure if MP Saad Hariri would be in attendance. (NOTE: He was not. END NOTE). He did say that Walid Jumblatt would be there, as would "many other MPs."

[13](#). (C) Discussing the negative attitude of the EU chiefs of mission about attending, Hamadeh noted that countries with a presence within the UNIFIL contingent "have become cowards," although he said he believed that the Spanish, Italian and Czech COMs would attend the congress if the French agreed. Hamadeh encourage the Charge to put pressure on French Charge Andre Parant to participate in the congress, noting that Parant is "no Emie," in reference to the previous French ambassador who was very supportive of the Siniora government. Hamadeh had a meeting of more than two hours on March 12 with Parant, but was unable to convince Parant to change his mind and participate in the congress. He said he told Parant that the Iranian ambassador is present at all the events staged by the opposition, but Parant was not swayed.

BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER  
ARAB SUMMIT CRITICAL

-----  
¶4. (C) Hamadeh was more inclined to talk about the Arab Summit, to be held in Damascus, saying that the GOL and March 14 is currently in a "no-go" mood, but Siniora was waiting to see how the invitation was delivered and worded before making any decision on GOL attendance (Siniora was in Senegal at the OIC meeting and had not reacted to the delivery of Lebanon's invitation to the Arab League conclave on March 13). Hamadeh stated that the real issues are, "before, during and after the Summit." Earlier thinking, since discarded, was to enlarge the cabinet, and send former president Amine Gemayel, as a new minister, to Damascus. But a Maronite might make a deal to which others in March 14 would object, Hamadeh said frankly. The Christians in March 14 are against attending at all, according to Hamadeh, and if the Acting FM Tarik Mitri and PM senior aide Mohammed Chattah went, there would be the risk they would be marginalized in a meeting dominated by heads of state and government.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO GOL  
-----

¶5. (C) There are other objections to attending the Summit, according to Hamadeh. The majority does not want the Lebanese situation discussed as a separate agenda item under the Bashar al-Assad Arab League presidency. Lebanon does not want to attend at a level higher than its key allies Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

¶6. (C) But the GOL actions after the Summit are critical. The majority will need to choose between enlarging the cabinet or electing General Sleiman president by something other than consensus. Patriarch Sfeir has been somewhat reluctant regarding the proposal to increase the cabinet by

BEIRUT 00000388 002 OF 002

adding more Christians, and Sleiman has given signs he has not relented in his position of not wanting to be elected with a majority plus one of the parliament. Hamadeh and others are pressing the PM to enlarge the current cabinet by three: one minister to replace Pierre Gemayel, one to replace resigned Minister Yaacoub Sarraf (Greek Orthodox,) and finally, after accepting his resignation, replacing Minister Trad Hamadeh (Shi'a, non-Hizballah.) Trad Hamadeh has been causing concern for the GOL by reappearing in his ministry every time a situation seemed to threaten the Shi'a hold on key sectors, and after rearranging things according to his wishes, again leaves the day to day work to the acting minister.

NO PARLIAMENT MEANS NO BUDGET  
-----

¶6. (C) Briefly sharing an overview of the mobile telecom privatization process, Hamadeh linked the expected additional delays to the lack of parliamentary approval for a budget, and administrative constraints. He said the cabinet is considering pressuring the Speaker to call parliament into session solely to deal with some issues, in particular, those that deal with the "health of the country," such as a budget.

NEW SYRIAN OPPOSITION  
TV EMERGES  
-----

¶7. (C) Finally, as an aside, Hamadeh mentioned that he received word that the Syrian opposition will be launching a TV station, probably with the financial support of Saudi Arabia. They are looking for a Lebanese manager of the channel, which will be based in Paris.

SISON